

THE TEMPORARY VEGETARIAN

Elaine Louie

EDER MONTERO would like to set one thing straight regarding potato tortillas: they should not be as brown as, well, a plate of hash browns.

"Tortillas classically should have very little color," said Mr. Montero, who is a chef and an owner of Txikito, a Basque restaurant in Chelsea. A pale golden yellow is more like it.

What gives the tortilla its elusive flavor is that the potatoes and onions are submerged in gently bubbling olive oil — three cups of it in this recipe. "The only expensive ingredient is the olive oil," the chef said.

But he points out that you can refrigerate the used olive oil for your next tortilla or to sauté vegetables another day.



JAMES STEINBERG

The tortilla is "an old dish, and found all over Spain, in every district, and is offered as a tapa, or served at homes for lunch or dinner as a main course with a salad or roasted peppers," Mr. Montero said.

It can be eaten hot or cold, and is good the next day. When it's cold, the chef eats it by itself, with mayonnaise on the side, or as the filling of a carbohydrate-on-carbohydrate sandwich.

"If you have to reheat it, do it at 350 degrees for five minutes, just to take the chill away," he said. "If you heat it too much, it will get dry."

At Txikito, potato tortillas are often on the menu as specials. Lucky employees sometimes get to eat them at the staff dinner.

POTATO TORTILLA

Adapted from Eder Montero, Txikito

Time: 25 minutes

3 large Idaho or other baking potatoes, peeled and quartered lengthwise, then thinly sliced crosswise

3 cups delicate-flavored Spanish olive oil

1 tablespoon plus **1** teaspoon salt, or to taste

1/2 medium white onion, thinly sliced

4 large eggs

Mayonnaise, for serving, optional.

1. Spread potatoes in a heavy flameproof casserole, cover with olive oil and sprinkle with salt. Spread onion on top. Place over

medium-high heat until oil bubbles. Reduce heat and simmer, stirring gently once or twice, until potatoes are tender but not broken, 7 to 10 minutes.

2. Place a mesh colander over a heatproof bowl, and drain potatoes and onion, reserving oil. In a large bowl, whisk eggs until frothy. Add potato mixture to eggs and stir gently to combine.

3. Place an 8-inch nonstick pan or well-seasoned skillet over medium-high heat. Add 3 tablespoons reserved olive oil. Add one-third of the potato mixture and stir with wooden spoon or spatula. Cook until egg is barely set, about 30 seconds. Reduce heat to

medium-low. Add another one-third of the mixture and stir for 15 seconds. Add remaining third and stir two or three times. Gently pat mixture to flatten it, and allow it sit until the top is loose, the center is somewhat firm and the bottom is firm (pale golden, not golden brown), about 30 seconds.

4. Run a spatula around perimeter of tortilla, shaking pan to be sure edges and bottom are free. Place a small flat plate that fits securely inside pan directly on top of tortilla. Wearing a kitchen mitt, grasp handle close to pan. In one quick movement, flip tortilla onto plate.

5. Quickly wipe out pan, add 2 tablespoons reserved olive oil, and return pan to medium-low heat

until reheated. Slide tortilla back into reheated pan so the bottom is now the top. Pat down to compact layers of potatoes and eliminate air bubbles. When tortilla is set and bottom and edges are free of pan, use spatula or spoon to turn in the edges to give tortilla a more compact, attractive, shape. If desired, tortilla can be allowed to rest for 5 minutes on lowest possible heat, before turning onto a serving plate.

6. To serve, slice hot tortilla in large wedges. It may also be covered and refrigerated for up to 24 hours, then served cold with mayonnaise.

Yield: 4 servings.